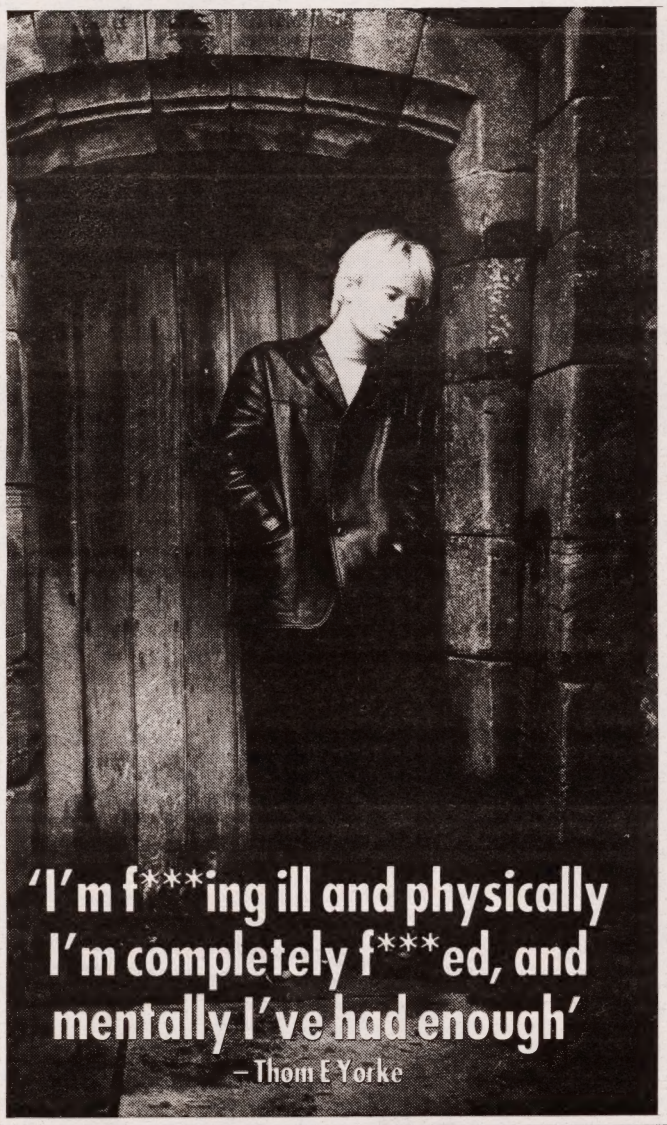
Radiohead prove that misery loves company (l-r): Jonny, Thom, Colin, Ed and Phil

# All You Need Is Loathe

**RADIOHEAD sold one million copies of their debut album, 'Pablo Honey'. They're about to be watched by 53 million viewers on MTV Asia. And their recent British dates saw manic scenes of almost Beatlesesque proportions. So why is mainman THOM E YORKE so pissed off? HOLLY BARRINGER tries to cheer him up. The dark stuff: STEPHEN SWEET**




THIS IS ABOUT as hysterical as British audiences get. Forget America, where adulation dribbles out of the minds and the mouths of nubile girls and boys. Forget all that shit, because this is England and English audiences want to be goddamned impressed. If they go home with anything less than the semen of God trickling out their ears, they want their money back.

There's a good few sticky ears tonight as Radiohead hit Manchester Academy. They are *awesome*. Not that they feel like they're home free yet.

"I was scared shitless about tonight," Thom E Yorke, Radiohead's diminutive deity and frontman, confides to 500-odd of us. "There are a lot of people out there who'd like to tear us to shreds. I hope you're not some of them."

This is Radiohead's first British gig since November and they are, by all accounts, a little apprehensive.

"Britain's important to me," Thom tells me later, "because we've been ripped to shit here, especially after Reading last year."

Thom is still smarting from having to pull out of last year's Reading after his voice failed him. People were less than charitable about the authenticity of his complaint.

"I woke up and I just couldn't speak, let alone sing," Thom says, eager to prove that he wasn't skiving. "I had people answering the phone for me."

This is what we've come to expect from Radiohead. Ever since "Creep", 1993's Top 10, near Brit Award-winning anthem for alienated tensomethings, Radiohead haven't been complacent Big Rock Stars. They are fuelled by the self-same lack of confidence that has most of us hiding in our wardrobes, afraid to come out lest someone should ask us to validate our existence.

Not that they run away from insecurity. No sirree, bub. Radiohead shake insecurity by the hand and take it on the road with them like a mascot. I go along for the ride.

**DISASTER** has struck. Thom has sprained his ankle, apparently at the end of "Anyone Can Play Guitar", when his onstage freneticism became a little too, um, frenetic. This cost him the use of his leg for the next two days.

Mild panic then ensues: will Thom be able to do tomorrow's gig in Wolverhampton? Worse still, will he be OK for Friday's climactic show at London's Astoria? Most important of all, will I get my interview?

Praise God and hallelujah – yes! Thom will be taken to hospital tomorrow, after being driven in a hire car to Wolverhampton. A small hitch in my plan, then, as he was supposed to come on the train with me. Still, this is the crazy world of pop and who the hell am I to argue with a green-stick fracture?

**WOLVERHAMPTON.** Cold. Grey. People with foonay acsints. It's mid-afternoon and Thom is still at Wolverhampton General having his ankle X-rayed. Things are not looking good: the schedule is blown, all remnants of order shattered by the hapless twisting of his (much lusted-after) extremity.

Jonny Greenwood is wandering round the venue, waiting to soundcheck, when his brother and Radiohead bassist, Colin (collectively, they're known as the "Greenwood Sisters" on account of them being so in touch with their feminine side and all), orders him to sit down and talk to me.

Jonny is a curious creature. Sitting on his hands as I talk to him, he shifts uncomfortably and smiles a giant, toothy grin (afterwards, he bounces up to Colin and announces that I scared him. Me).

Ever tactful, I ask Jonny how he likes being in the new U2.

"U2 were a band that I had friends at school who liked," he says, diplomatically. "Thom likes them. I don't have any of their records, although I heard 'Achtung Baby' a few weeks ago and it's dated really quickly."

Jonny is the baby of the band, although, in his case, this means that he's less *enfant terrible* and more awestruck aficionado.

"You know what it's like when you were at school and there were people who were, like, four years older than you who were really tall and in charge of stuff? Well, now I'm spending my life with these same people."

Cute.

**PHOTOGRAPHS.** Autographs. Two things likely to cause either extreme embarrassment, or, for the more super-confident, unabashed pride and preening. In Radiohead's case, you get a kind of dignified resignation.

MM's photographer has found a suitable location for the pictures in front of a church. A gaggle of Radiohead T-shirted teenagers assemble to watch the band pose for photos, and afterwards approach our limping hero for an autograph.

I ask Thom if this happens a lot now. Unsure whether I have just posed a trick question, he coyly looks up from signing his name and whispers "Yeah!" as if he doesn't know what answer I want.

Ah, would that all of Radiohead were so well known round these parts. Walking back to the venue with the Hugh Grant look-alike and self-styled "polite" guitarist, Ed O'Brien, and the drummer, "Thoughtful" Phil Selway, a tout outside the hall asks us if we need any tickets for tonight's show.

"No thanks, we're on the guest list," laugh Ed and Phil.

What price fame, eh?

**TIME** is running out – I have about an hour to talk to the band before they go onstage. Getting them all into one place is like gathering mercury with a needle, but finally they all assemble in the dressing room. However, Thom has told me he can't talk (he's got to rest his voice for the gig). Instead, he paces round the dressing room, smiling sarcastically at his bandmates' comments.

So what does Radiohead banter consist of?

Ed: "Blimey, I'm so completely der-runk."

Colin. "Did you see the football yesterday?"

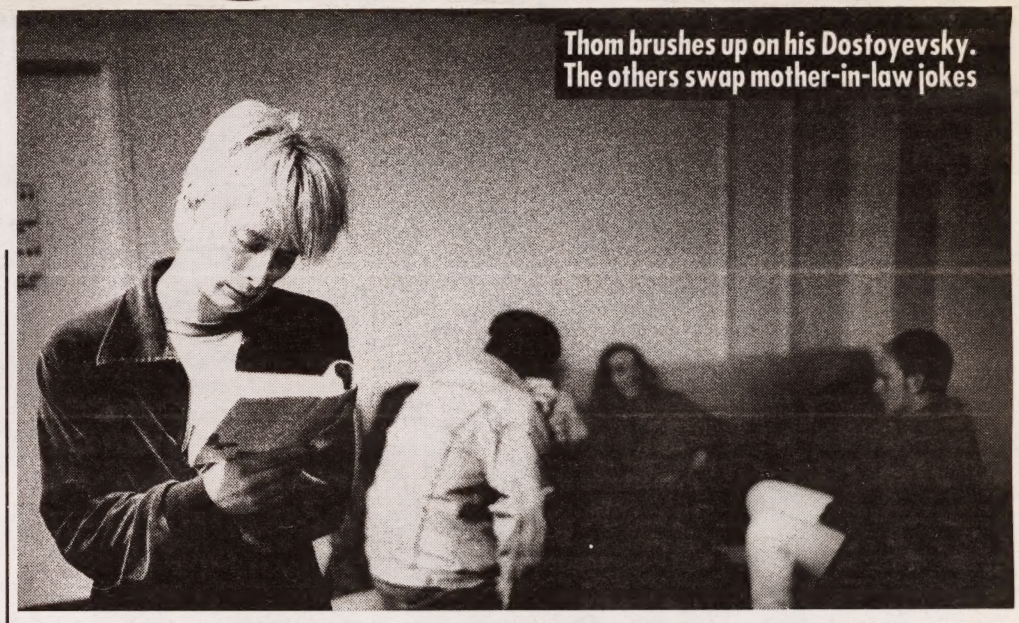
Jonny: "I'm having trouble with seven down."

When I ask about what strange and wonderful things have happened on this tour, Jonny's face falls.

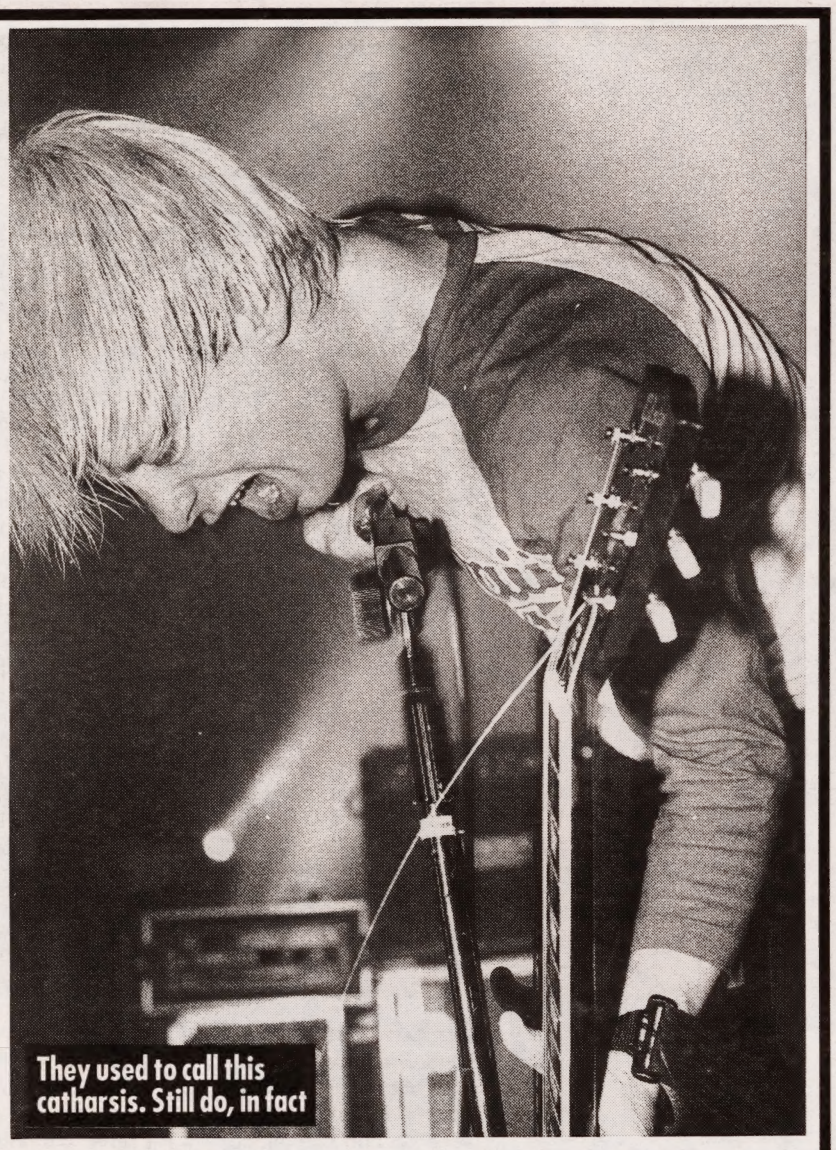
"Oh no," he groans, "I knew it was coming. There's always a pained silence when we get asked that."

Phil, looking concerned, covers all their tracks.

"The thing about touring is that, because you spend so much time together, you get all these stupid in-jokes. *That's* the funny part of touring. Sad, really."



Thom brushes up on his Dostoyevsky. The others swap mother-in-law jokes


They used to call this catharsis. Still do, in fact

At this point, Jonny interjects with a forceful "Ausland!" An in-joke, presumably.

So how do they stave off boredom?

Jonny giggles.

"Brian Jones impersonations," he says, in a knowing way.

"Ed's perfecting his Euro MTV jock accent," Colin offers, as Ed goes into German "partyline" mode, recalling a band they played with in Switzerland, called Soddom and Warpath. A torrent of negative remarks erupts at the mention of "girl friends on tour".

"Ooh, no, crikey, no, never," they cry as one. Adds Colin: "They'd probably get bored. Yeah, even more bored than we get."

"Definitely," Ed confirms, who caught up with the rest of the band recently when he got himself attached.

"I think," says Phil, "that because it's strictly men only on tour, you do need some female company from time to time."

"God, you sound like a soldier," laughs Colin, "looking for female company!"

"It's like 'Nam, isn't it?" observes Ed.

"Yeah," Colin agrees, "this is the point where the tour manager puts bromide in the tea."

"I wouldn't say we were especially, you know, boys together," Phil adds, "but elements of that do creep into it when you're all together. It's that gang mentality."

"Tour buses are weird," Colin neatly turns the conversation away from women. "There's something really weird about having 13 people, all sweaty from the gig and no showers, all sleeping in a space that can't be any more than three and a half metres long, all these bodies stacked up on top of each other in a really closed, confined space in a bus hurtling along the motorway at 60mph or whatever, in floods of rain. Going past a river and there's a mountain, and you're like, f***, if it falls off, no one's got a chance, and you stay up all night sweating with fear. . . sorry, am I going on?"

Only slightly.

**THOM** E Yorke is shattered.

It's 1.30pm and the gig (undoubtedly one of the best gigs I and, by the looks of it, Wolverhampton, have ever seen) finished hours ago. Thom says he should talk to me now before he loses his voice, or consciousness, or both. Not only is Thom exhausted, he is also, as it turns out, deflated. I ask him whether their new song, "Paranoid", is driven by the same self-loathing that inspired "Creep".

Sitting in the foyer of our hotel, nursing a glass of iced water, a sore throat and a f***ed-up ankle, he answers slowly, carefully choosing his words.

"Self-loathing?" he says, almost too weary to talk. "Well, that's just what one song was about."

What are you about now?

"Well, there's this thing about us being a student band but, when I think of a student band, I think of Ned's Atomic Dustbin. If we aimed at people, then that would be niche marketing, wouldn't it? We aim at ourselves. Although that's a bit of a lie nowadays because we get a lot of recognition for what we do."

Does the generally quite pensive Mr Yorke find it easier to write sad songs or happy songs?

"I don't write happy songs," he says. "Besides, emotions aren't defined as happy and sad, are they? Unless you're in advertising. There's a whole range of emotions and the ones I don't tend to write about are the ones that go: *'I love my job/I love my life/I love my work/I love my wife'*. It's like, you're f***ing sad, then, aren't you?"

Thom is not a happy man right now, it must be said.

"I'm a f***ing wreck at the moment." He proves the point by putting his head in his hands. "I've got no idea whether tomorrow's gig is gonna work or not. I've got no idea if I'm gonna be able to sing. I've no idea whether my foot will be all right, or anything. I'm constantly going, 'Aaaaagh!'"

Thom and I sit in silence for a while. He hides his face in his palms, I hide my tape recorder in mine. Finally, he breaks the silence.

"My voice is absolutely f***ing shredded, thanks to having to do these festivals last weekend – get up at 10 in the morning and sing a whole set. It's f***ing ridiculous and we shouldn't have to do it. I'm at my wit's end completely."

Another uncomfortably long silence, then: "Thing is, you reach a certain point and that's it. I'm being pushed beyond that point. Way beyond it. Physically and mentally."

Thom has already earned a reputation for lugubrious navel-gazing bordering on – let's be straight – whinging. But no one can work out why this young man, faced with commercial success, critical acclaim and the sort of rapturous devotion normally reserved for yer Bonos and yer Vedders, is so bloody miserable.

"I don't understand what I'm moaning about," he says. "I'm constantly saying, 'Why is this a problem? You're doing this, this is great. You're playing in front of 2,000 people at the Astoria tomorrow.'"

"Why is it a problem?" he repeats my question. "It's a problem because I'm f***ing ill and physically I'm completely f***ed, and mentally I've had enough. It may be great because of that but it may be awful, and it all just rests on me, and I've never been in that position before, not in Britain. I don't care about anywhere else."

Phew.

Methinks it's time to cheer things up with a couple of quickfire opinions on contemporary pop issues.

The New Wave Of New Wave, Thom?

"Cak."

Kurt Cobain?

"Dead."

I thank you.

***Radiohead will release a brand new single in September***


primal scream

jailbird

6/6/94 • includes remixes by
the dust brothers • kris needs • sabres of paradise

taken from the album

give out but don't give up